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THE JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF
WASHINGTON, D. C. 20301

ACSAN 69-71
5 March 1971

MEMORANDUM FOR DR. HENRY A. KISSINGER, CHAIRMAN,
VERIFICATION PANEL

Subject: The Case for NCA Level of Ballistic
Missile Defense in a Strategic Arms
Limitation Agreement

1. During the Verification Panel meeting on 2 March 1971, you probed in depth the advantages and disadvantages of an NCA level versus a zero-level of ballistic missile defenses in the context of the U.S. 4 August SAL proposal. The following paragraphs present a military view of the decided advantages of retaining as a minimum an NCA level of ballistic missile defense.

2. From the standpoint of long-term security for the United States -- and hopefully for the world at large -- our current efforts to negotiate a strategic arms limitation agreement should be viewed as a first step in a step-by-step process to establish a new relationship between the super-powers. To expect that we can define in detail a negotiable agreement which meets all requirements on both sides for a period extending far into the future is unrealistic. Assuming that there is a mutuality of interest in pursuing soundly based strategic arms limitations, neither side should wish to seek in the first step some dramatic measure which may have as yet unrealized consequences for the nation's security. A zero level of ballistic missile defense falls in this category.

3. From a military view it is strategically unsound to zero out any single element of the strategic offensive/defensive force equation in the sort of circumstance which is envisioned in an initial first step strategic arms limitation agreement. Even a minimum contribution to an element of the strategic force equation -- in this case anti-ballistic missile defense -- compounds the enemy's

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strategic problems and forces him to devote resources and attention in a measure which may be considerably out of proportion to the actual capability of the specific strategic force element.

4. An NCA level of defense -- without for the moment defining the numbers of launchers, interceptors and radars -- represents a rock-bottom first step position for this element of offensive/defensive forces. The NCA level, in combination with other actions, protects decision makers on both sides from a small scale nuclear attack, thereby reducing the dangers that an unauthorized, accidental or third-country attack on a capital could set off full scale nuclear exchange between the superpowers.

5. Although a zero level may not preclude the continuation of research and development in the area of ballistic missile defense, it would have a serious debilitating effect on R&D programs. It would be difficult indeed to persuade highly competent scientists and technicians to approach with zeal the development of systems which by treaty will never be fielded. With a zero level ABM, we leave ourselves open to technical inferiority in an important field and thus to technical and operational surprise. It would be imprudent for the U.S. to deny itself a base for vigorous research and development and some minimum of operational employment expertise as a basis for pursuing ABM related technology.

6. A ban on ABMs is not likely to be more easily defined and negotiated than is an NCA level. In the broad context, verification difficulties and our concern regarding SAM upgrade are not significantly reduced. In the description of a zero level ABM which we have already provided the Soviets, we permit Soviet retention of early warning and search radars (Hen House) -- and the Soviet air defense system with its radars remains unconstrained. Thus, the definition and distinguishability problem remains.

7. The Soviets have proceeded thus far in SALT at a careful, cautious, measured pace -- giving every evidence that they believe that if progress is to be made it should be on a step-by-step basis with the first agreement constituting the first step in continuing long-term strategic arms negotiations. A sudden shift of emphasis to a zero level of ballistic missile defense would be a sharp departure.

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8. Finally from the standpoint of the U.S. negotiating stance, a push by the U.S. -- or a specific proposal by the U.S. -- for zero rather than an NCA level -- would confuse the Soviets and lead them seriously to question U.S. purposes.



ROYAL B. ALLISON
Lieutenant General, USAF
Assistant to the Chairman, JCS,
for Strategic Arms Negotiations

Copies to:
Mr. John N. Irwin, II
Amb Gerard C. Smith
Mr. David Packard
Mr. John N. Mitchell
Mr. Richard Helms
Dr. Edward David

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